The Telecom Industry Tunes in to the Customer Experience

A look at how the telecom industry has evolved its customer strategies
to meet consumers' changing needs and behaviors

Exerpted Articles From:

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Executive Q&A: Verizon's Secret Weapon for Next Level Marketing

Chris Hansen, associate director, digital design & development, Internet sales operations at Verizon, talks to 1to1 Media about the company's strategy for adapting to the shifting mobile, multichannel customer landscape. —*Adapted from Customer Strategist Journal*

With more than 1,700 retail outlets in the U.S. and more than 101 million wireless customers, marketing strategies at Verizon must take a disciplined, omnichannel approach to engaging customers.

Through the use of Adobe Marketing Cloud, its internal collaboration efforts, and staying true to the company's goal of delivering the right experience to the right customer at the right time, Verizon is successfully sending dynamic, personalized messages to customers over myriad devices. Chris Hansen, associate director, digital design & development, Internet sales operations at Verizon, discusses the inner workings of the company's omnichannel marketing efforts.

1to1 Media: Over the past couple of years marketing has had to rapidly evolve as customers' changing digital and device habits have changed. How has this evolution influenced Verizon's marketing efforts?

Chris Hansen: Being in the industry that we're in, the marketing and device strategy has changed so much that we had to quickly adapt to what our customers needed. At Verizon, we strive to stay ahead of the curve and offer up what the customer needs and wants from us and adapt our marketing strategies to be mobile-first.

1to1: How has mobile impacted the way Verizon approaches its marketing campaigns? How has the multi-device phenomenon impacted your efforts?

CH: We're broken up into multiple areas. When it comes to mobile, we recognize that that it is an area where the industry is going and where society is going in terms of being connected all the time. We attempt to market and drive our strategy toward providing the right support and the right sales opportunities in any given channel. Working with an omnichannel approach right now allows any given touchpoint to integrate with the customer.

1to1: What does omnichannel mean to Verizon and how are you developing your strategy to deliver on this growing trend?

CH: There are multiple campaigns going on to ensure we offer up the customer what they need when they need it. For us, connecting all those touchpoints along the way…is really to ensure we are delivering an end-to-end experience for the customer and not dictating *what* they need but *when* they need it at any given time.

1to1: How is the organization working collaboratively to deliver an omnichannel approach?

CH: My team works closely with TV and the print side of the house to ensure that the roadmap of where our campaigns are going is integrated as tightly as possible so we are truly one Verizon across the board.

1to1: We hear a lot about the necessary union between marketing and IT. Is this happening at Verizon and, if so, what's been the resulting benefit of this partnership?

CH: We have a strong partnership with our IT department. We are a collaboration of marketing and technical so our relationship with IT is extremely strong because we know we have to work together to be successful. As easy as it is to be siloed, we have to break down the barriers. We have marketing folks sitting in IT and IT folks sitting in marketing to have that cross pollination.

"At Verizon, we strive to stay ahead of the curve and offer up what the customer needs and wants from us and adapt our marketing strategies to be mobile-first."

– *Chris Hanse, Associate Director, Digital Design & Development, Internet Sales Operations, Verizon*

1to1: **You have more than 100 million customers. How is Adobe's Marketing Cloud helping you to facilitate your multichannel marketing approach with customers?**

CH: We have a strong partnership with Adobe and have a number of (the company's products. The products that make up Adobe Marketing Cloud are extremely important to how we do business. The tools we have from Adobe allow us to be faster to market and also provide what the customers want when they want it. It's an important piece of our infrastructure. If I look at the overall integration of profiles and dynamic tag management…those things will allow us to dynamically serve up more creative and offers that are personalized. Part of our responsibility to customers is to understand what their needs are. With their permission and our available opportunities, we serve them the experience they expect.

1to1: **How is Verizon ensuring it delivers those experiences consistently across a consumer's multiple devices?**

CH: We are actively doing that today. We are serving all those assets across multiple devices and we're able to launch things faster. We're able to deliver the same experience in some ways and differently in others depending on the devices that they have. We have a mobile-first methodology moving forward and we have to adapt in that sense.

1to1: **How are you delivering dynamic personalized experiences for customers?**

CH: We have all the tools necessary to do so but it's about tying all those tools together. The new (Adobe Experience Manager) 6.0 will help us connect those dots. We are able to personalize messaging based off different parameters at different times and customize those messages. It's based off all the data we gather.

1to1: **Today's marketers are tasked with being data scientists. How do you ensure with all of the added responsibilities of your staff that creative doesn't fall by the wayside?**

CH: We've taken a strong approach lately to have data drive most of our decisions. When it comes to creative…we have to continue to make that connection with our customers so the creative aspect of it along with the promotional messaging has to work hand in hand. We can't do one without the other. Part of my responsibility is being creative so we're very much in tune with that to ensure the creative matches the quality. In that way we speak to the customer.

1to1: **What's in store for Verizon in the coming year? How will you plan to advance the customer engagement strategies you have in place?**

CH: Truly it's personalization. We have to get better. Because things change so fast we have to keep adapting and being as flexible as we can be but we have to do it in a way that is respectful to our client base. Because we have 103 million customers, it's getting to the multi-device scenario. One of the goals of Verizon is to continue to engage our customers in our brand, provide them with the information they need when they need it, and personalize their experiences to ensure they're tailored to them.

1to1: **What challenges do you expect to face along the way?**

CH: The biggest challenge we face is not to feel like the messaging is creepy. We want to be cognizant of our customers' data. We want to make sure we're not doing things that are disrespectful. I can see how it can be perceived to where people are almost tracking you in that sense. It's really about the right time and the right place. It's not the second you hit submit, we're going to have to test our way into it. It's when do we approach the customer the next time and how often and with what messages. It's about finding the right balance and understanding where those critical touchpoints will affect our business.

Five Customer Loyalty Fixes for Telecom Companies

Telecom companies must boost their investments in providing a great customer experience or risk facing declining customer loyalty in the coming years. Here are five actions they need to take now to stay competitive.

When was the last time you heard someone rave about an experience they had with their Internet, television, or mobile phone service providers? Going by numerous sentiment-measuring reports, the likelihood is that such an occurrence is very rare.

Let's change the question around: When was the last time you heard someone complain about their experience when dealing with a telecommunications company? The likelihood is that we don't have to think long and hard to remember about a poor experience that we've heard or read about.

Despite the telecom industry's cutthroat market environment in which brands steal competitors' customers by buying out existing contracts and constantly undercut rate plans to get customers to switch, few have made customer centricity a priority. This shortcoming is evidenced by the industry's low Net Promoter scores in Satmetrix's recently released 2014 Net Promoter Industry Benchmarks. With a score of 39, Tracfone had the highest NPS among cellular phone service companies, while DirectTV's NPS of 34 ranked it highest among cable and satellite television providers. Bright House Networks' NPS stood at 20, even though it was the top-ranked company among Internet service providers. To put these scores into perspective, USAA gained NPS scores in the 80s for banking, automotive insurance, and home and contents insurance.

Further, television and Internet service providers were among the companies receiving an average of "poor" ratings in the 2014 Temkin Experience Ratings.

So why are customer experience metrics for telecom companies continually low? And more importantly, why does it seem like there have been no customer strategy advancements despite the constant threat to their customer loyalty? Perhaps it's because they're all in the same boat. "The best-in-class companies are not faring much better than those that are ranked at the worst positions," Chris Burton, senior vice president for communications, media, and technology at TeleTech, notes.

Traditionally, telecom providers have looked at cost and coverage as two of the main areas of investment. In fact, even marketing messages seem to target these two factors as main differentiators. Verizon, for example, uses maps of the United States to compare its 4G LTE coverage with coverage areas of other providers.

But in an intensely competitive market, where companies are constantly trying to one-up their competitors, lack of investment in customer-centric measures is seeing clients considering other companies, with some actually pulling the trigger and making the move. While cost and coverage are important factors for customers, on their own, they are not enough to avoid churn. "It's no longer enough to just be the cheapest offer," notes Martin Morgan, Openet's director of marketing. As Don MacNeil, CMO for Xo Communications, explains, in today's uber transparent market, customers can easily find out more about the companies they're doing business with and also about their competitors.

Further, even though many customers are tied down by contracts, a negative customer experience could very well drive them to a competitor once their contract is up, if not before. T-Mobile, for example, is even offering to pay the much-dreaded early termination fees of customers who want to switch carriers for their postpaid plans. If other companies follow suit, customers will have the option to break their contract anytime their current provider fails to deliver on their expectations, or they come across a better offer. Experts share five actions that telecom companies should take to attract new customers and retain existing ones:

1. Move towards a customer-based focus: Organizations across all industries suffer from departmental silos. Especially when customers buy more than one service from a company, it's imperative that the organization makes the necessary investments to create a 360-degree profile of its customers. As Burton explains, some telecom companies are trying to consolidate their CRM systems to have a more holistic view of their customers and enable the delivery of better customer service. Further, improved customer visibility will allow telecom providers to reiterate what other industries have been doing for some time—offer services and products that best fit an individual or a household's needs. "They need to steer away from the one-size-fits-all

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– Chris Burton, Senior Vice President, Communications, Media, and Technology, TeleTech

approach and instead offer products and services that address the needs of different segments," notes Michelle Nowak, vice president of product management at CSG International.

2. Invest in first-contact resolution: Customers want their problems addressed and rectified immediately. However, as Burton notes, many telecom providers rate poorly when it comes to first-contact resolution, reflecting negatively on their customer satisfaction scores. There are a number of steps that companies can take to resolve issues immediately, including investing in training for contact center agents and providing agents with access to the information they need to give customers the answers they need. Ryan Pellet, senior vice president for strategic consulting services at Nexidia, also recommends using insights from contact center calls to determine what is making customers unhappy and making them want to churn. Information from individual calls, he notes, needs to be put in context of the relationship between a client and the company to better understand whether this is the first time that particular customer had a problem or whether this is a recurring complaint.

3. Focus on an omnichannel experience: With customers communicating with brands over multiple channels, organizations need to make sure that they can connect these different touchpoints and provide continuous experience across the board. While brands are trying to provide new ways for their customers to get in touch with them, the different channels are often siloed. Burton uses the example of a customer who starts an inquiry with a company by engaging with chat support when he realizes that the issue is complicated and he would rather get on the phone with an agent. "But many times there is no direct way to connect to the agent, and when the customer finally navigates the provider's IVR maze, he's often connected with someone new who doesn't have visibility into the chat conversation." In order to improve the experience, telecom companies need to consider investing in technologies like unified communications platforms and the cloud, as well as unifying the organization internally to connect the disparate channels and provide seamless transitions for customers.

4. Provide proactive warnings and information: In today's connected world, customers expect to be able to communicate anytime and anywhere. Loss of a wireless connection or Internet access is, for many people, an experience they will go to extremes to avoid. Nowak says one service that telecom companies should invest in is warnings and alerts when customers are about to reach their data limits. This, she notes, is especially important for those on shared plans who might not know how much data others in the group have used. "Use real-time data to notify customers about what they're buying and what they're consuming," Nowak recommends. Ulla Koivukoski, senior vice president for Comptel's analytics business unit, agrees. "We need to proactively reach out to a customer before he calls us," she notes.

Organizations should go a step further and use such opportunities to inform customers of other plans that might fit their needs better. "Understand their needs, quantify them, and offer them the right services." Koivukoski uses the example of Bangladesh-based pre-paid mobile provider Robi Axiata, which is leveraging data to determine what services customers need and then letting them know about the packages that make the most sense to them. Further, Morgan highlights that these offers need to be timely. "If a customer is using his mobile phone to watch a video and encounter a problem with data, send him a message with an offer to make up for that issue," he recommends. "Apart from being relevant, an offer needs to be timely or it will stop being relevant."

5. Identify high-value customers: While all customers are important, there are certain segments that are more valuable than others. Telecom companies need to first determine the attributes of their high-value customers and then identify these clients. The next step, Burton notes, is to determine who, among this group, is most likely to churn, for example those clients who are approaching the end of their contract. Not only can organizations make sure these segments are routed to higher tier agents who can provide a better experience, but they should put structures into place to proactively reach out to these customers with relevant offers and information. For example, a cable company which knows that a particular household enjoys watching movies might offer that account a month of free movie channels or credit to use towards the purchase of on-demand movies.

Acquiring new customers is neither easy nor cheap. This is why organizations need to make sure those new customers are satisfied enough to want to continue doing business with the brand. Otherwise, companies are in for an endless cycle of acquisition without retention, a practice that will drain their coffers.

Executive Q&A: The Power of Optus' Virtual Agent

Chris Smith, the head of online for the telecommunications company, discusses the correlation between the company's virtual agent and customer empowerment. *—Adapted from Customer Strategist Journal*

Busy customers have become increasingly interested in finding ways to self-serve. In fact, as this 1to1 Media article highlights, automated self-service is a growing global trend. Forward-thinking business leaders have recognized the need to provide self-service capabilities, not only because their customers are requesting them, but also because they help lower the company's service costs.

Optus, a teleco provider in Australia and New Zealand, is one company that has embraced this trend and made the necessary changes to provide customers with the ability to self-serve through a virtual agent, which the brand introduced in May 2013.

As Chris Smith, the company's head of online, explains, the Optus Virtual Agent is designed to answer simple and commonly asked questions that don't require live agent response. "She's here to empower our customers to go online and resolve their low-complexity queries on their own," he notes.

Further, the interface, developed by IntelliResponse, allows customers to also see the top trending topics on the same page, including other customers' questions. "Ultimately, the virtual agent benefits all customers as she manages simpler queries, freeing up agents in other areas like web chat and the call center to handle more complex questions," Smith notes.

In this interview with 1to1 Media, Smith talks about the benefits of the virtual agent and the self-service trends that Optus is seeing.

1to1 Media: Can you share the recent self-service trends that you've been seeing?

Chris Smith: We're definitely seeing self-service increase as more customers have more options and choose different channels depending on their needs. Web chat on mobile is proving incredibly popular – we've even heard stories of customers using this while they're in meetings at work. Finally, agility is becoming more important for our customers as they start conversations in one channel and then finish the interaction in another.

1to1: What do you attribute to customers' increased propensity to want to self-serve?

CS: We know customers want to be in control and have the flexibility to manage their needs when and how they want. They may not have time to call up the call centers and go into a store so they prefer to self-serve. Above all, customers expect rapid, accurate, and consistent answers.

1to1: Can you share some figures that highlight the move to self-service?

CS: Before we introduced the Optus Virtual Agent on our "Contact Us" page, more than 70 percent of consumers chose not to use or weren't aware of our self-service options and instead called our call centers. Now, less than 39 percent choose to call, leaving the other 60 percent to self-serve online.

1to1: How is the virtual agent helping improve the customer experience?

CS: The Optus Virtual Agent answers questions using natural language, so it's really easy for customers to use. They simply type in a question the way they would verbally ask it and get an instant response. If customers need more help, the virtual agent offers Chat with a live agent transferring the history of the customer's journey to the live chat agent so that the customer doesn't have to repeat what they have done so far.

1to1: The Optus Virtual Agent has been asked more than 3.6 million questions since it was launched

> "We're definitely seeing self-service increase as more customers have more options and choose different channels depending on their needs."
>
> *–Chris Smith, Head of Online, Optus*

less than a year ago. Can you share the most popular questions?

CS: As she was originally only located on the "Contact Us" page until recently, not surprisingly her most popular question was "How do I contact Optus?" In November 2013 the Optus Virtual Agent was moved to the Help & Support area of the site. Here are the most popular self-service questions: When does my mobile contact end? How do I use My Account? I forgot my password. How do I contact Sales? What mobile plans do your offer? I'd like help with my Home Broadband modem setup. How do I pay my bill? How do I change my plan? I need help using my mobile or tablet? How do I check the balance of my bill?

1to1: How much quicker is asking a question to the virtual agent compared to contacting the call center?

CS: The virtual agent responses instantly whereas it takes longer calling the call center and going through the recorded options to get to an agent.

1to1: Can you also explain how this is helping Optus reduce service costs?

CS: Cost savings are achieved through call deflection and decreased volumes through our call centers. We've also recently refreshed our website, www.optus.com.au and mobile app, which will hopefully drive more customers to self-serve.

1to1: Has this system helped improve satisfaction among call center agents by reducing the number of simple questions that get directed to them?

CS: We have retrained our call center agents to help them to better problem-solve customer issues. We've removed a lot of our old metrics like call handling time so agents can focus on solving problems the first time around. The Optus Virtual Agent helps with this by reducing simple questions so the agents can focus on the more complex ones. Our Web chat agents are now well aware of the virtual agent tool and later this year we will make it available on all agent consoles.

1to1: Does the system learn from customers' questions? If so, how has it evolved since you implemented it?

CS: Yes the virtual agent is self-learning. When we first launched, the Optus Virtual Agent was able to return a response to manually entered questions 78 percent of the time. Now, 94 percent of customer questions return an answer with a 93 percent accuracy rate.

1to1: Can you share any future plans to improve self-service?

CS: We recently added a virtual agent to our Help & Support section of the Optus site and we may add in the Optus Virtual Agent avatar this year. We're also looking at adding things like Facebook integration, assisted form filling and integration with the My Optus App.

T-Mobile Embraces Online Customer Care to Strengthen Loyalty

By blending its social support strategy with its emerging live chat channel, T-Mobile's enhanced, consistent service spans across all touchpoints to ensure quick resolutions and customer satisfaction.

Loyalty and trust are often the result of an open, honest relationship that allows room for growth. Yet, while that might sound like the recipe for success in the personal realm, these elements weigh heavily on the longevity of brand relationships, as well.

In March 2013, T-Mobile launched its "un-carrier" initiative, which was designed to free customers from the standard obligations of the wireless industry by eliminating yearly contracts and early termination fees. Thus, in doing so, customer loyalty became an even more critical focus, as the nationwide brand sought to offer world-class customer service across all touchpoints.

"By freeing our customers from contracts, we have given them the option to walk away from our service at any time, for any reason," says Jen Palmer, director of knowledge management and social media service. "If we don't provide the service our customers want, expect, and deserve, they can leave us. So it's our responsibility to consistently earn our customers' loyalty by resolving their issues and providing the best experience in our services, our offers, and across all customer interactions, whether it's in store, over the phone, on social media, or through online chat."

Just as T-Mobile chose to change, the wireless carrier also recognized a shift in consumer behavior, as more customers took to the Web to find information and request service. However, the company's social success outpaced its live chat options, thereby leading to its latest analytic innovation. T-Mobile chose to apply the customer service lessons learned in social, such as communicating effectively and solving problems through text-only conversation, directly to chat. By redirecting its internal focus to examine and align with consumer behavior, T-Mobile planned to optimize the company's holistic online engagement program through its data-driven, analytical approach to understanding customer interactions. Thus, the brand moved to develop the right partnerships, processes, and tools to execute this endeavor efficiently, ultimately bringing the channels together, aligning resources, and providing a better, more consistent customer experience across channels.

By partnering with TouchCommerce, T-Mobile created a systematic, repeatable approach to benchmarking the quality of customer chat experiences and monitoring real-time chat volumes, enabling the carrier to efficiently staff agents and reallocate resources as demand dictates. The core objective of this partnership aimed to provide enhanced customer analytics and reporting, enabling T-Mobile to seamlessly gauge whether the right customer service agents are involved and if representatives are properly empowered to do their job. T-Mobile also wanted to determine why customers were contacting the company and evaluate their experience with the chat team in an effort to understand consumer behavior and empower service agents with the insights necessary to be more available and responsive to online inquiries.

T-Mobile adopted a new internal motto—listen, engage, and resolve—while the social support team adopted its newfound responsibilities, as the brand believed it would be beneficial to blend best practices from social to improve chat. The carrier then focused on two central metrics to quantify its understanding of the customer experience and apply said data to measure performance and make decisions.

While the myVOC score represents insights from customer surveys, the GRE score evaluates courtesy, concern, and resolution based upon internal chat transcripts. Each metric provides T-Mobile with a more holistic view of the customer experience, allowing the company to identify opportunities for improvement. As a result of T-Mobile's live chat advancements, myVOC scores increased by 0.2, while GRE internal quality measurement scores jumped +0.1. In return, the average customer wait time decreased by two minutes, average handle time decreased by 150 seconds, and resolution rates grew by 6 percent.

"It's our responsibility to consistently earn our customers' loyalty by resolving their issues and providing the best experience in our services, our offers, and across all customer interactions."

–Jen Palmer, Director of Knowledge Management and Social Media Service, T-Mobile

DIRECTV PanAmericana Enhances Analytics to Drive Conversions and NPS

By developing its single-view customer profile approach, DIRECTV PanAmericana can now pinpoint the early signs of churn as the brand works to reengage and transform detractors into promoters.

As the leading satellite television provider for Latin America and the Caribbean, DIRECTV PanAmericana serves nine territories, reaching more than 17 million customers with its exclusive content, excellent customer service, and continuous deployment of the latest entertainment technologies. Yet, while information plays an essential role in any business, the huge increase in consumer data required DIRECTV to reconsider how it analyzes, classifies, and stores this information in an effort to continue providing the best entertainment experience possible.

Ultimately, DIRECTV aims to always surprise its customers at every point of contact by remaining vigilant of their evolving expectations. Thus, in 2011, DIRECTV partnered with SAS to implement an integral business analytics solution that answers numerous questions about the organization: *Which customers are likely to churn and what factors lead to their decision? What are the main drivers behind customer satisfaction and how do promoters and detractors impact the bottom line? Is the brand upholding its promises and performing as expected across all touchpoints? Does DIRECTV recognize employees' efforts in relation to customer impact and do these employees understand how their roles influence the customer experience?*

Because many of these questions had yet to be answered, DIRECTV created an analytical roadmap that served as the foundation for its Pan Regional ACE (Analytical Center of Excellence). This program was designed to both promote the use of analytics and to support the end-to-end analytical needs of the entire company. Though DIRECTV boasts an array of experienced, qualified employees, the company failed to capitalize on their knowledge by providing a platform where they could share their experiences with one another, thereby repeating mistakes and reducing accuracy. Thus, to alleviate confusion and enable sustainable decisions, the ACE was designed to address technology, consulting, education, and administration within the context of the business to analyze and reveal any shortcomings.

For instance, DIRECTV was able to identify and rectify the average employee's lack of information and analysis capabilities. By implementing the SAS tools and training key users, employees gained easier access to user-friendly data, achieving enterprisewide analytics support. Said tools also enabled users to view information from different sources and countries on one platform, thereby providing analysts with the necessary information to make their work more time efficient.

DIRECTV's findings also revealed the need for contact automation, which allows the company to reduce unnecessary contacts, such as calling valued customers during collection campaigns, and increasing necessary contact, such as reengagement calls to those at high risk for churn. Voice of the customer text mining enabled the provider to dive even deeper into customer opinions, uncovering the drivers behind satisfaction and the problems that create detractors. DIRECTV's underlying goal to convert detractors into promoters remains at the center of its strategy, for these extremes can have varying impacts on the bottom line.

Detractors, overall, are 110 percent more likely to churn voluntarily, each costing the company $204, while promoters carry 2.5 times greater value than detractors. However, since building out its business analytics abilities, DIRECTV saw Net Promoter Score increase by 1.1 percent and churn improve by 0.2 percent in 2013 alone, highlighting the solution's success and its promise for the future.

Since building out its business analytics capabilities, DIRECTV saw Net Promoter Score increase by 1.1 percent.

Portugal Telecom Gives Customers Content Control

By allowing customers to create and broadcast their own TV channels, Portugal Telecom fosters engagement and brand loyalty through its innovative entertainment platform, which subscribers can't find anywhere else.

Though television may traditionally be considered one-sided, technology continues to alter our perceptions of even the most common mediums. For Portugal Telecom (PT) customers, television has become the brand's primary differentiator, as the introduction of MEO Kanal, its personalized broadcast platform, allows clients to build and broadcast their own TV channel, which they can easily share with friends and family, or all MEO customers.

"Breaking through technological barriers, with support from the MEO infrastructure of PT's television, each client can now have his or her own TV channel—a capability that, until now, was only accessible to large corporate producers and distributors," says Celso Martinho, director of technology. "The thinking behind the development of this service was to give a TV channel to each customer and bring them a new way of TV viewing."

During the development and design process, the PT team focused on the consumer's need for simplicity, thereby basing its approach upon client expectations. Thus, after countless focus groups and several internal beta versions in collaboration with SAPO, MEO Kanal launched in February 2012, with the intent to boost customer acquisition, retention, and loyalty. By putting content creation in the clients' hands, PT sought to reinvent the television experience while creating brand awareness. To increase word-of-mouth, PT even encouraged employees throughout the organization to use the service and share their channels with family and friends by launching an internal challenge that urged the staff to record unforgettable moments during their summer vacations. The best channels were then rewarded based upon the total number of views and overall creativity.

PT also created numerous demo channels, featuring high quality videos from popular sportsmen, comedians, and musicians, to demonstrate the appeal of this innovation, along with the quality and attractiveness of the service. These demos served as inspiration for thousands of new public channels from local musicians, entertainers, and sports teams looking to highlight their talents, as well as local TV channels and newspapers looking to migrate to video. Even churches and political candidates have embraced MEO Kanal, for they recognize that having this direct channel allows them to reach new audiences that were previously inaccessible.

However, roughly half of all MEO Kanal channels are private, as families and friends can share videos and photos with one another. Creators need only establish their PINs to maintain security and ensure their content remains private. Corporate clients that choose to use the platform as a commercial vehicle, on the other hand, have access to premium features via MEO Kanal's paid version. Enabling clients to share such content quickly and easily with whomever they choose augments the TV viewing experience, while also incorporating some social flavor.

"This service has changed the way the television is used and this is one of its major breakthroughs," Martinho adds. "MEO Kanal is the closest thing we have to social media on TV, but keeping the experience of standard TV channel visualization."

The development and project management teams continuously work together, enabling their motivated workforce to maintain the service's high quality standard, while managing the brand's roadmap, resource allocation, and customer care process. By using daily and weekly dashboards, the management team remains up to date on audience trends, the number of channels created and hours of video uploaded, the number of unique viewers, churn rate, and all other relevant KPIs. New features, such as the clients' desire to broadcast live events, are often the result of both customer suggestion and constant analysis of service usage, for the company's roadmap revolves around what PT's growing audience and channel creators

"This service has changed the way the television is used and this is one of its major breakthroughs."

– Celso Martinho, Director of Technology, Portgual Telecom

value most. Big Data analysis also allows PT to deliver customized content to customers based on the millions of interactions collected, processed, and analyzed, as the company works to align its offerings with clients' interests.

Overall, those clients who post their content on the MEO Kanal platform are more loyal than regular customers of the MEO IPTV service standalone, which supports PT's ultimate goal to boost both loyalty and retention. PT's MEO Kanal channel creators and viewers have a lower churn rate (-2 percent) than MEO clients who have never used the service, resulting in improved customer satisfaction and engagement. Client behavior upholds this trend, for the daily time spent using PT's TV app averages 2 hours 25 minutes—almost half the time an average person spends watching TV in Portugal. Upon MEO Kanal's first anniversary, PT also dispersed a customer satisfaction survey to approximate Net Promoter Score results, culminating in an average 4.5/5. Today, MEO Kanal boasts more than 40,000 channels and 75,000 hours of content, and continues to grow daily.

Visualizing Video's Future in the Telecom Industry

Video has the power to educate consumers and employees, facilitate self-service, and promote products in engaging ways. Here, AT&T and Liberty Global demonstrate how video puts customers and employees in control.

Video truly engages the senses, for the sights, sounds, and motions are often more compelling than traditional text communications. From personal to professional pursuits, people simply gravitate toward video because the medium offers an intrinsic appeal and advantage over all other content types, for video allows companies and customers to convey much more complex information than can be shared in the average text document.

However, as video continues to weave itself throughout the consumer's daily activities, telecommunication and media companies are only on the cusp of integrating this medium into their overall strategies. For telecoms, video offers the opportunity to build engagement, thereby boosting loyalty and retention. However, for many, this means of communication remains underutilized, as brands slowly begin to adopt video as an essential component of their customer service strategy.

Tom Wilde, CEO of RAMP, notes that, in many cases, it's much easier for companies to shoot 90-second how-to videos than to provide consumers with lengthy, written instructions that may discourage and dissatisfy, ultimately increasing attrition. Because, as Wilde emphasizes, video has the power to do much more, as its nature facilitates verbal explanations and visual demonstrations, allowing telecoms to solve issues and address service problems succinctly and straightforwardly.

On the customer engagement side of the business, telecoms have the opportunity to use video in a way that informs and inspires. Video allows companies to promote services and products by providing customers with visual product tours. For instance, wireless carriers can demonstrate any given smartphone's or tablet's primary features through video demonstration, which becomes much more compelling than reading complicated side-by-side feature comparisons. By supplying this information clearly and concisely at the beginning of the customer relationship, telecoms are sure to establish an increased level of trust, loyalty, and overall transparency.

When it comes to customer satisfaction, video has the power to drive improved knowledge bases as consumers increasingly gravitate toward self-service. In many cases, customers have already created their own communities as they attempt to help one another solve problems that can't seem to be resolved via the given telecom's manuals or websites. Many such communities consist of crowdsourced how-to videos that demonstrate to the necessary steps for rectifying such issues as battery replacement or hardware installation—problems that these companies should offer solutions for themselves. By taking cues from what's already being said, telecoms can proactively provide consumers with their own how-to videos so as to strengthen the customer relationship and increase trust.

"Providing customers with easy access to product and service information has direct implications on brand satisfaction and perception," Wilde says. "Taking the time to supply customers with what they want and need offers the brand itself an opportunity to look at what customers are posting themselves as they crowdsource to solve problems they cannot otherwise solve through the brand. By offering this information directly to aid self service efforts, such as video versions of the company's user manual, telecoms can increase loyalty by making it easier for customers to use and be successful with their products."

On the employee side, video has the ability to educate and empower, for this medium can provide employees across the organization with the knowledge to improve the customer experience. Video tutorials can quickly teach technicians how to install equipment during training exercises or in the field in ways that may become lost in translation as written documents. Video can also help retail store employees understand the key features of the brand's most popular products, with tutorials that can teach them how to sell that given item successfully. This emerging medium can even facilitate collaboration and knowledge management, as telecoms look to diagnose problems remotely. The challenge, however, comes into play as companies work to make videos actionable internally. While text documents have been historically known
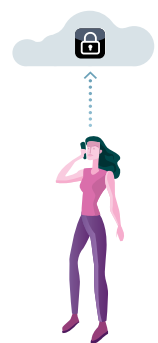
"Providing customers with easy access to product and service information has direct implications on brand satisfaction and perception."

– Tom Wilde, CEO, RAMP

to generate leads and satisfy customer inquiries, telecoms must develop ways to move beyond video's potential brochure-like nature to solve business goals while supporting superior service and experience.

For New Customers, Video Fits the Bill

Though video adoption may still be in its infancy, numerous companies have tapped into this method of communication so they may educate customers about their bill. When new AT&T clients sign up for the company's U-Verse or mobile services, they are met with an individualized, personalized video that examines their current fees and charges. AT&T leverages SundaySky's SmartVideo technology to deliver the information new customers seek by sending video bills for the first two months. This format clearly introduces each customer to the brand's billing process and the charges they will incur each month, allowing them to retain these videos for future reference.

Because each video comes personalized, AT&T uses the customer's name and walks them through each element step-by-step so they know exactly what they're paying for and what they can expect to see as the relationship progresses. In particular, these videos come tailored to each customer's concerns, thereby steering clear of irrelevant generalizations in order to reduce confusion. AT&T also offers this video service to current clients that have recently made changes to their accounts to tackle billing questions that often arise. By preemptively answering customers' questions and addressing their concerns, AT&T not only reduces call center traffic, but also establishes the foundation for loyalty, as this transparent first impression will likely help boost retention and sustain satisfaction.

Watch this video to explore precisely what these video bills entail, including the personalized analysis of each charge:

Liberty Global, one of the largest international cable companies, operates similarly by providing new customers with an individualized, personalized video bill that examines their fees and charges, while also outlining essential information about their new accounts. With more than 24.5 million customers across 14 countries, Liberty Global aimed to enhance the customer experience while driving operational efficiencies. Using Idomoo's personalized video technology, this global brand offers clients first-time video bills so they may lay the groundwork for understanding and loyalty. Such videos highlight the customer's new services, his monthly payment due date, and current charges, all while emphasizing the company's on-site self-service offerings.

By encouraging site registration, Liberty Global demonstrates the level of power it puts directly in the customers' hands. Online accounts enable clients to expand upon the information learned through these introduction videos as they manage their accounts, order new services, view and pay their bills, and learn tips on how to get the most of Liberty Global's services. Not only does this strategy aim to reduce call center query volume and increase site registration, but it also sets the stage for an informed, empowered relationship. Giving customers control and transparency upfront will ultimately strengthen loyalty, advocacy, and retention down the road.

Watch this video to observe how Liberty Global's video bill works and how its clear, concise nature helps alleviate concerns:

CenturyLink Turns the Tables on NPS

The communications company just completed its first internal NPS survey to gauge the effectiveness of employees.

For more than 10 years, Net Promoter Score (NPS) has been used by organizations to measure and improve their customers' loyalty. Today, some companies are turning NPS on themselves as a benchmark for internal improvement.

CenturyLink, a communications and media company, for example, uses NPS as a metric to gauge the effectiveness of its internal processes, departments, and individual employees within them. The company completed its internal NPS survey in June and is currently analyzing the results.

Here, Jon Windley, vice president Business Customer Experience, discusses how the program works, the resulting benefits, and the company's plan to eventually link internal NPS with its customers' NPS.

When did you launch your VOC program?

We are early in the rollout of the employee piece of the entire customer experience program. We have a reasonable new NPS program for customers on the business side and we're just starting to roll out the full-blown program. The essence of it is in addition to the normal customer relationship surveys we're doing, we are just through the first deployment of four internal NPS surveys. We have a unique way of doing it. We are not doing it to get feedback on general things. What we asked employees to do is pick three internal organizations they work with on a regular basis and give them an NPS score and tell why they gave the score. What you then create is a picture of a specific group. We've done it for all the customer-facing organizations in CenturyLink.

What is the benefit of that?

You create a story around each of those teams. We have 90-plus organizations. Of those 90 organizations, 30,000 employees were invited to pick any of those groups and comment on a theme. This is a different approach to employee engagement. What we're trying to get at are several things, such as how well that team works with other teams. Ultimately, they're getting a sense of collaboration.

Are they required to give verbatim comments?

They aren't required, but boy do they. Roughly more than one-third of the employees filled out the survey with an average of three comments per employee. We had well over 30,000 comments.

How are those insights shared with the organization?

We have the customer experience team using Verint's Impact 360. Speech Analtyics go through and look for significant word pairings, themes, and things that are significant. Then they slice and dice the data different ways. And then we look at it horizontally. We'll look at a particular product set and then something jumps out.

When we do the survey we ask, would you recommend this organization? And how collaborative are they? That's the essence of this survey. If we improve collaboration we will create a better customer experience. We also ask how well do each team's processes work and then we ask them to rate those processes. Also, how well do they communicate? The whole point is we are trying to create a picture for each organization for how the teams around them relate to them. The expectation is once you receive the information like the scores and verbatim comments for your teams, you will take your experience and you will create improvement plans. It's about, 'how can I get better?' In this case all analysis is local. It's about team themes. It's not about these global themes across the organization. We then ask each team to put together a one-page improvement plan for each organization.

We want each organization to get better. There's no recipe there. Some groups may get a negative number here. It depends on what they think they need to do to create a better customer experience.

> "We are trying to create a picture for each organization for how the teams around them relate to them."
>
> –Jon Windley, Vice President, Business Customer Experience, CenturyLink

Is the intention to connect this with customer feedback?

The intention is to create what amounts to a relationship survey. We'll look for intersection points with customers to see if additional focus is needed in certain areas. Those are our next steps.

What tools and technologies are you using to analyze the feedback?

All the external and internal surveys are in the Verint platform. We use the VerintImpact 360 Speech Analytics tool to do the analysis. We also have a team of four going through the verbatim comments using keyword pairing.

Did you have a hard time selling this idea initially?

The executive team embraced it. There were no barriers.

What insights and outcomes do you expect as a result of these efforts?

The first is we absolutely expect to see improved collaboration across teams throughout the customer corridor and to get better at collaborating to support customers. The second thing is if we get this right our employees will be happy. They'll be better at their jobs and they'll get a better experience. Happy employees typically mean happy customers. If I do those two things…and I'm taking the information and trying to fix issues within organizations, I'll also have better processes. I'm taking this information to Six Sigma black belts to fix our processes.

What advice do you have for others considering such an approach?

Embrace the process because it's hard. You'll get feedback, but for some teams it will be difficult to hear and take action based on those insights. Anytime your employees are willing enough to help you, be willing to accept that information, take it to heart, and do something to make their experience a better one.

Are there mitigation plans in place for teams that score really low?

We are baseline. We'll do another survey next year and then look at the results. It doesn't really matter where your scores are the first time. Next year I want to see the scores improve. The beauty of this survey is that it's extremely hard to manipulate. It's the elegance of what we're doing.

How Are Telecoms Using Customer Data?

Discover which data points telecom companies are collecting and how they're using this consumer insight to enhance experience, improve relationships, and reduce churn.

Telecommunications companies have been gathering customer data for decades, but the recent interest in Big Data continues to draw considerable attention to customer data collection processes. Not only are customers concerned about the 'how'—the ways in which such information is gathered—but also, the 'what'—which data points are being tracked and for what purpose.

No matter the industry, data security weighs heavily on both the company and the customer, as breaches remain one of the biggest threats to consumer safety and satisfaction. Thus, it's important to maintain transparent data collection strategies in order to retain trust and loyalty. Customers are well aware that telecom brands collect information for billing purposes, but as such methods become more granular, all such companies must offer clear privacy policies and opt-out capabilities for those consumers who wish to control their personal data independently.

On average, says Ryan Pellet, chief strategy officer at Nexidia, telecommunications companies collect four general types of data:

1. Data about the customer—For existing customers, two-thirds of this information comes directly from the given company, while one-third comes from third-party data organizations that gather insights, such as credit ratings and household demographics. Prospect data, however, comes from third-party sources entirely. Brands have also started to embrace social media data in an effort to understand consumer interests and behaviors and develop well-rounded, targeted profiles.

2. Data about the customer's usage—Tracked via telemetry, usage data focuses on the who, what, where, and how behind consumer behaviors. Companies gather insights into the duration of usage activities, how often this set of behaviors occurred, and if a company's interactions with a customer based on this information worked. Unfortunately, however, much of this usage information gets tossed aside, while the crucial data points are used to calculate billing costs. Unused data, conversely, offers insight into potential improvements.

3. Data that ties usage to rating and billing—Generated by the product and marketing teams, this information determines how much consumers should be charged for making calls or using data. Because consumers are increasingly quick to switch providers, companies must constantly look for new ways to differentiate their services, retain current customers, and recognize their values. Thus, companies must employ competitive intelligence to curb churn and maintain appeal.

4. Data about customer interactions with the company—Customer interaction information comes from any and all brand interactions consumers have had with the organization throughout their journeys. From phone calls, to email or social media conversations, this data is also the largest non-monetized data asset for most telecom companies. Brands must listen to this feedback by creating listening posts that will enable them to assess what's right or wrong and the competitive landscape.

"The voice of the customer has been around for many years, yet most companies with VoC programs have not listened to the literal voice of the customer," Pellet adds. "Interaction data is, by far, the largest non-monetized data asset in existence in the communications industry. Leaders are turning every interaction into data, and then identifying patterns that chart better, deeper, and more profitable relationships.

No matter the industry, data security weighs heavily on both the company and the customer, as breaches remain one of the biggest threats to consumer safety and satisfaction.

The customer will tell you exactly why they buy or leave, what they like or don't, and if the service is valuable or empty."

Before diving into this incoming data, of course, telecom companies must determine which points will be most valuable for strategic business planning and development. Rebecca Sendel, senior director, product management at TM Forum, says that, to determine which relevant data points should be collected and analyzed, telecom companies must begin with the end goal in mind. Brands must consider the problems they are trying to solve and what they're trying to improve by collecting data. Such thinking must be at the core of data collection, as data just for the sake of data serves no purpose. This data should also help to expose areas for improvement, monitor success, and establish priorities to ensure the most valuable consumers are receiving optimal service no matter their interaction channel. External data, specifically, can reveal what kind of services customers would like to have so the company may better target or alter their marketing practices to define and personalize upsell offers according to customer behavior.

"To provide real-time, personalized, and appropriate offers to improve customer engagement, telecom operators require a holistic, contextual understanding of their individual subscribers' usage patterns, behaviors, and circumstances, such as location and influencer circles, in order to fully maximize their business opportunities," says Mikko Jarva, CTO, Intelligent Data at Comptel. "Technologies and practices of extracting real-time insights from the data streams through analysis provide means for telecom operators to react more quickly, become more informed, and react in more targeted ways to changes, opportunities, and threats to their business, enhancing customer relationships and driving continued loyalty."

Because the amount of data being stored and analyzed continues to expand, companies now have ample opportunity to deepen customer relationships. For instance, proactive services, such as rectifying issues before the customer knows something's wrong or making data plan offers that better fit usage patterns, not only strengthen loyalty and satisfaction, but such actions also increase consumers' willingness to share their personal data. Now, companies can drive actionable recommendations based on these patterns.

One leading telecom company, for example, now leverages usage data to track the general daily usage of its products and services at the individual customer level. The brand can detect when individual daily usage isn't in alignment with the given customer's overall usage patterns, as this may signal service issues that need to be rectified promptly. Through proactive investigation, the company can often reveal and remedy issues before the customer ever becomes aware of the problem. Employees will then notify the customer of the issue and its resolution, calling their actions to attention and requiring the customer to confirm their flawless service. Ultimately, this strategy switches the dynamic, as the company takes responsibility for monitoring service instead of depending upon the customer to discover and report any issues. The brand can get ahead of major issues that may impact long-term customer satisfaction and retention, thereby delivering uninterrupted, consistent service that differentiates the customer experience.

With so much data to collect and analyze, it's often difficult for companies to bring everything to action simultaneously. Thus, telecoms must establish end goals in order to gather and analyze data efficiently and effectively so they may extract true value from this wealth of information.

Mastering the Multi-Screen Phenomenon

As marketers battle to keep the average consumer's diminished attention span, they must also embrace multi-screen behaviors to deliver relevant content and maintain audience engagement.

The popularity of digital media and online social interactions has given rise to a new rule of customer engagement for media companies: Marketers must engage in meaningful and active dialogue with customers and prospects across multiple screens to create strong connections and foster brand advocacy.

Essentially, media marketers must disrupt their own industry to stay ahead.
"We're all familiar with the example of Millennials using multiple screens at a time—the TV will be on in the background, tablet on their laps, and buzzing cell phone by their sides," says Paige O'Neill, CMO of SDL. "But these habits aren't limited to Millennials. Most of us do some variation of multi-screen viewing during work, switching between mobile devices like phones, smart watches, and laptops, and after hours, in front of tablets or the TV."

Thus, as emerging consumer behaviors continue to blur the lines between demographics, media brands must adjust internal strategies to cultivate an external approach that caters to such trends. Multi-screen marketing, at its core, provides companies with the opportunity to engage in effective storytelling, thereby allowing the brand narrative and subsequent experiences to unfold across multiple platforms, says Wilson Raj, global customer intelligence director at SAS. Marketers and advertisers can target audiences precisely where they live, work, and play.

For marketers, the multi-screen phenomenon helps brands engage with their consumers more immediately, offering insight into how audiences react to content in real time, says Amit Avner, CEO at Taykey. These insights also aid advertisers' efforts to extend the reach and relevance of an ad campaign by enabling increased personalization and improved targeting.

However, Raj notes that there's a prevailing mindset within the space that believes TV remains the base of all such multi-screen strategies, while other screens merely augment consumer reach. Thus, most media plans are skewed toward one screen, ultimately disregarding the actual media behaviors of many consumers. Instead, media companies must look at one single campaign objective such as increased awareness, reduced attrition, or customer retention, and then align their multi-screen strategy to that particular goal in an effort to maintain consistency across all devices.

"The ways in which consumers interact with brands have changed," Raj adds. "They're engaging across a range of devices and media, but still expect consistency around look, feel, and messaging. The trick for cross-screen marketing lies in understanding the user as a single person. We used to consider social media users, or even mobile consumers, different from desktop or in-store consumers. Now it's essential for marketers to look at all of the screens as opposed to just TV and online video."

Sean Coar, group vice president, strategy and business decisions for Time Warner Cable, emphasizes that marketers must learn more about their consumers' behaviors so they may customize media placement and messaging in ways that connect with viewers at the right time via the right channel. These strategies enable marketers to be more creative and responsive, as this improved understanding allows them to develop campaigns that work across all screens to connect consumers. Typically, campaigns become fragmented because marketers lack reliable audience data. Therefore, as leading companies grow familiar with these new screens, they will begin to incorporate demographic and behavioral addressability into campaigns, as well as frequency management across screens to limit repetition and maintain customer connections.

Coar also notes that, when it comes to relevant messaging, much depends upon both place and

"The ways in which consumers interact with brands have changed."

–Wilson Raj, Global Customer Intelligence Director, SAS

context. Devices used, screen size, and time of day impact how audiences consume various forms of content. Therefore, marketers must recognize and acknowledge that screens are no longer exclusive to the living room, as content consumption isn't solely limited to TV. Smartphones, tablets, and limited attention spans all contribute to this perfect storm of impending innovation, leaving media companies with no choice but to embrace this technological evolution and align with emerging audience behaviors in order to connect with consumers where they are using the most appropriate message for that environment.

Twitter continues to be one of the most commonly used second screens, with 72 percent of users tweeting during live television broadcasts. However, listening applications, such as Shazam and TVTag, are also on the rise, according to Taykey's Avner, as these tools allow viewers to identify TV commercials that are currently airing and help audience members interact more closely with the given brand. Consumers can unlock special deals or enter contests without needing to actively search for this second screen content. Thus, brands can bring content directly to their target customers with relative ease.

Shazam, in particular, was originally intended to identify or tag songs users may hear during their daily routine. However, the app's developers shifted into the TV business last year, introducing tagging capabilities for programming and advertisements, while still remaining true to its musical roots. This new model drives viewer engagement during commercial breaks, drawing up bonus content and links that encourage purchases and interactions related directly to what's on screen. Such methods also provide brands with valuable insight into user engagement with their ads and audience size at the given time. By engaging in this process of perpetual learning, media companies will effectively evolve alongside these technological advancements in ways that allow them to develop dialogue and connect with consumers regularly and relevantly.

ABC Brings Multi-Screen Engagement to its Primetime Lineup

For ABC, social media has become an integral element of the viewing experience. While many networks may see Twitter and Facebook as mere distractions, executives at ABC embraced such tools in an effort to generate buzz and cultivate engagement. ABC Family, the company's sister network, saw early success with its original hit show, Pretty Little Liars, which continues to dominate the social sphere by garnering consistent engagement from the age 12-to-34 demo bracket. With nearly 14 million Facebook fans and more than 2 million Twitter followers, the network encourages conversations by displaying pre-designated hashtags in the upper left corner of the television screen. These strategies encourage audience members to discuss their theories and share their reactions in real time, thereby promoting live TV in an era where DVR and on-demand services have altered traditional viewing habits.

Dancing with the Stars (DWTS) has also taken the social sphere by storm, as the network's hit reality show now enables viewers to engage with the live broadcast. Though DWTS typically displays viewer tweets at the bottom of the TV screen during the results portion of each dance, for season 19, the show introduced two new ways for audience members to interact via social that go well beyond voting for their favorite couple. On "You Raise the Paddle" night, viewers can tweet their scores for each competing couple. These scores are then totaled and calculated in real time and combined with the judges' scores, allowing viewers to help or hinder these stars' chances of success. For the show's traditional "Switch Up" episode, viewers were also asked to tweet their ideal partner choices, with the winning combinations dictating which pros and which stars would dance together the following week. Such strategies allow viewers to use this second screen to both share their thoughts and directly influence the fate of each contestant.

Telecoms Call Big Data Into Action

Telecom companies now recognize that Big Data holds the secret to improved sales and customer service.

From mobile phones and landlines, to television and Internet services, the telecom industry lends itself to the Big Data boom, for each of these channels generates vast amounts of customer information. Digital channels, in particular, have increased this volume exponentially, as consumers now have mobile Internet access within reach via smartphone 24/7. But, as the available pool of data continues to grow, telecom companies are faced with the challenge of deciphering this information and bringing insight to action.

"There's tremendous value in Big Data, provided an operator knows what bits of information are the most meaningful to extract and analyze," says Carla Fitzgerald, CMO at Smith Micro. "In order to transform telecom services, improve network quality, and create new offerings, operators must pull insights from the network, the device, and from customer activity. Once analyzed, operators can use this insight to address performance or service issues from a business level, which translates to better quality of service for the end user."

Suzanne Clayton, senior product marketing manager for communications, media, and entertainment at SAS, notes that telecom Big Data initiatives usually fall into one of three categories: revenue growth, operations optimization, and network management. Because telecom carriers are the key enablers to the adoption of digitized media, with subscribers consuming more and more content via accompanying devices, providers have one of the highest "data per customer" of any industry. Thus, these initiatives now look beyond traditional means, as telecoms look to take advantage of the granular insights they've helped to generate.

Though traditional tactics are still relevant in terms of marketing, digital techniques now boost the effectiveness of said older channels by offering the ability to collect, analyze, and draw conclusions from measured data that was otherwise difficult or impossible to deduce previously.

According to Hardik Shah, service provider platforms at Citrix, there are typically three ways telecoms look to leverage subscriber data:

1. Gain actionable marketing intelligence—Marketers receive the birds' eye view of data and location usage across mobile networks, gaining actionable intelligence derived from experience and CRM data. Telecoms can then take to these digital channels to launch relevant offers in real time, fostering personalized, one-to-one relationships.

2. Improve customer care—Customer care representatives gain insight into how subscribers use their data, enabling them to better manage the customer experience, promote loyalty, and diminish call volume and duration, ultimately leading to reductions in operational costs. Agents can also empower subscribers to manage their own plans and usage by presenting such statistics upfront, thereby reducing care costs even further and improving customer satisfaction.

3. Monetize data—Analytics tools enable operators to create new revenue streams by monetizing usage and location data, as such capabilities allow advertisers to measure the effectiveness of digital campaigns in the moment. Service providers have the opportunity to push said marketing messages multiple times in real time until the customer responds or intention changes.

Digital data allows telecoms to analyze customer behaviors at the root so they may understand how these individuals interact with their brands and how they employ their devices in order to better tailor product and service offerings accordingly. Said data also helps telecoms discover the source of any emerging issues so they may proactively resolve such problems before they impact customer experience.

"Telecoms, like most companies, are looking to differentiate themselves in this increasingly competitive environment."

– Bob Moore, Head of Customer Insights and Market Research, TDS Telecom

Overall, said information benefits both the company and the consumer, as this intelligence boosts the provider's ability to deliver the sort of service subscribers seek in today's increasingly competitive market.

Here, we explore how two telecom companies are integrating Big Data capabilities to improve internal operations in an effort to enhance overall customer experience:

TDS Telecom Examines Survey, Social Data to Improve Service

While Big Data exposes telecoms to numerous new opportunities, service providers must first determine which data points are relevant to their overarching goals. For TDS Telecom, essential data comes from the information collected via surveys and social media, as the brand aims to understand consumer behaviors and provide subscribers with the most reliable, targeted services possible.

"Telecoms, like most companies, are looking to differentiate themselves in this increasingly competitive environment," says Bob Moore, head of customer insights and market research. "A few of the main opportunities to differentiate are customer loyalty and retention, monitoring the competition, and looking for technology trends. For instance, creating customer segments based on internal customer data allows a provider to profile its their most loyal customers and create internal processes, enabling product managers, marketers, and frontline agents to serve customers based on internally tested best practices."

Because customer service has become crucial in the digital age, particularly in the case of loyalty and retention, TDS Telecom focuses upon transactional, perceptual, and marketing surveys to gather both customer and employee feedback so it may quickly and easily determine customer satisfaction as it pertains to its products and employee morale with regard to training and educational programs. Ultimately, Moore adds, telecom companies must go where the data lies. Thus, TDS Telecom has also integrated social media data to better learn where and how customers want to do business. Millennials, for instance, often take to Facebook and Twitter to ask questions and post complaints. By actively listening across mediums, TDS Telecom can determine which services deserve increased attention, which issues require immediate resolution, and which factors instigate churn.

However, Moore notes that, while good market researchers can help decipher data, telecom companies must establish the correct infrastructure, software, and database architecture to ease analytical difficulty. The entire organization must align to work collaboratively so that Big Data may be brought to action in and effort to drive innovation throughout the enterprise and strengthen subscriber relationships.

IDT Telecom Embraces Big Data to Enhance Security Initiatives

No matter the industry, customer safety and information security are top of mind for all leaders, as the Big Data boom brings with it numerous questions and concerns. Telecoms, for instance, are susceptible to fraud and theft as these companies house vast amounts of sensitive data that, if compromised, could alter brand perception and customer loyalty for good.

For IDT Telecom, Big Data places a crucial role with regard to operations and engineering, as the company constantly looks at detailed records and information across multiple areas of the organization to consolidate said data and better analyze and draw insights from what's available. IDT Telecom also finds Big Data increasingly important for safety purposes, as security teams seek to prevent theft of services and private information. Malicious intrusions and theft of data are growing security concerns within the telecom industry. Thus, by closely monitoring call quality and consumer activity, IDT Telecom can detect threats and improve experience simultaneously.

"Like any telecom company, customer satisfaction remains top priority at IDT, and the use of Big Data and analytics has helped us bring our services closer to our customer," says Golan Ben-Oni, chief security officer. "This has translated into increased call quality, lower operating costs—savings that are then passed on to the customer—and better overall user experience on both traditional and mobile applications and services."

With regard to security, IDT Telecom has created monitors and thresholds that alert internal teams and, under certain conditions, automate changes on the network infrastructure when unusual activities are detected. Said alarms also inform the company of unauthorized activity that may be taking place on customer networks so employees can enact proactive, protective measures in near real time. Analyzing information collected also enables IDT Telecom to understand how it can better serve customers within specific world regions, as different areas require different services. By focusing on protecting consumer safety and best interests, IDT Telecom operates with intelligence and integrity.

Dial 'M' for Mobile Customer Engagement

As the telecom space becomes increasingly competitive, mobile carriers must reassess their current strategies, shaking up the typical customer relationship in an effort to boost loyalty and reduce churn.

Mobile customers rarely speak about their carriers with affection or loyalty. Though many own tablets and smartphones, few view provider relationships as anything more than necessity. But, as larger carriers begin to level the playing field by offering similar rates and devices, the mobile industry must look for innovative ways to revolutionize and refresh these stale consumer perceptions.

"Many consumers are only tied to their mobile carriers by the red tape of their contracts as opposed to a sense of brand loyalty or engagement," says Berkley Charlton, managing director, enterprise location intelligence at Pitney Bowes. "These relationships are tenuous at best and easily rocked by the offer of a new deal or a decline in network service. When price is the only differentiator, it's tough for mobile carriers to move customers from commodity status to something stickier."

Because many consumers believe their provider thinks of them as nothing more than data points, not human beings, mobile carriers have a long road ahead, for they must proactively counteract these views in an effort to regain customer trust and loyalty.

How Customer Service Impacts Mobile Carrier Relationships

No matter the mobile carrier, customer service remains the most important component for long-term success. Though most consumers believe such relationships to be a necessary evil, carriers must work to build closer bonds if they are to reinvent the way users perceive their service.

"In many markets, consumers have also burned their fingers historically on prices that were higher than anticipated, coverage areas that weren't as expected, or contracts that had longer notice periods than necessary," says Fredrik Jungermann, managing director at tefficient. "Consumers are, therefore, not always trusting of carriers and can be of the belief that 'everyone is average' and that only price matters."

As Jason Somerset, director of product services at Bandwidth, notes, mobile carriers must hone their customer-centric approach, for technology and innovation have brought the conversation face-to-face. Thus, mobile carriers must actively listen and react to customer input now more than ever. After years of restrictive cellular plans and pricing structures, consumers are extremely open to lower costs and greater trust. Therefore, carriers need to be present for the conversation that's happening, as the customer service element boils down to a human-to-human conversation and interaction—something refreshing in an otherwise stagnant industry. Allowing the consumer to be part of the process, while offering the flexibility to change or alter their personal experience, will be vital to prevent attrition in the future.

Carriers understand the potential revenue opportunities based on customer lifetime value, and that winning over a customer from the competition has significant promise. But many fail to think beyond acquisition, leaving most to operate within an industry that treats new customers better than existing ones. For instance, the benefits of introductory bundles typically outweigh those offers presented down the road. Yet such strategies don't make sense since the carrier can track records for every existing customer, calculating any associated risk—an element that's more or less absent for new customers.

"Another critical metric that must not be ignored is First Call Resolution (FCR)," says Anna Convery, executive vice president of OpenSpan. "When a customer calls in to the contact center, the agent should have the resources and customer intelligence at their fingertips to be able to resolve their issue during that single call so that the customer doesn't have to call back into the contact center. If your FCR rate is 50 percent, then for every 20 calls that come in, 10 are resolved in a single call and another 10 are calling back to the center. It's inefficient and costly from an operations standpoint, but it's even more detrimental

"Many consumers are only tied to their mobile carriers by the red tape of their contracts as opposed to a sense of brand loyalty or engagement,"

–Becky Charlton, Managing Director, Enterprise Location Intelligence, Pitney Bowes

to your customer retention goals considering the likelihood for a customer to defect to a competitor is greater if their problem isn't resolved after the first call."

Carriers must come to understand customers and their journey so they may pinpoint what triggers churn, identifying behavioral patterns in an effort to establish the best way to retain customers and make them happy. Charlton echoes this sentiment by emphasizing that, in today's saturated market, sustainable revenue through customer acquisition no longer stands as an effective strategy. Instead, carriers must pay equal if not greater attention to customer retention, for success ultimately comes down to customer lifetime value and loyalty. Not all customers are equally profitable, however. Carriers often waste time on customers who won't be impacted by their marketing efforts. Thus, providers must leverage detailed customer data to target those who'll be most receptive, bypassing those who will churn regardless and those who may react negatively or indifferently in order to focus time and attention on consumers who will increase revenue and maintain brand loyalty.

What Smaller Carriers Are Doing to Generate Revenue

While the average mobile telecom customer does business with one of the industry's larger carriers, few value their relationship. In fact, most feel that these major corporations don't truly care or value them, the customer, in return. Thus, many are turning to smaller carriers in an effort to turn things around.

"Too often, the average mobile consumer settles for status quo—at least with the big national carriers— in terms of customer service, pricing, and contracts," Somerset says. "There's little-to-no innovation, no personalization in service, and little compromise on plans and devices. Consumers put up with this simply because they think they have no other option, except maybe prepaid phones. But the carrier landscape is changing, and small players are beginning to challenge big telco, both in service plans and devices, as well as in how they interact with their customer base."

Smaller players have typically used price as their primary differentiator, but the modern data usage boom has created new opportunities to offer more for less in bundles. By giving consumers more data for the same price as their larger competitors, smaller carriers have the chance to attract customers that are interested in mobile data and will likely continue to be high-usage consumers in the future. Smaller carriers may also benefit from internal data as it pertains to retaining existing customers, for such granular data can be used to personalize retention and upsell offers in ways larger carriers often ignore.

However, as Lauren Smith, vice president of business solutions at ClickFox, highlight, disruptive industry strategy and innovation will only get the smaller carriers so far, as larger carriers tend to own more of the airwaves, thereby leaving smaller carriers at a disadvantage, for most lack access to the spectrum and frequencies wearables and sensors require.

But, despite such technological setbacks, smaller carriers are making the most of what they have by introducing revolutionary concepts that break the established mold. Though not for everyone, these smaller providers offer services that allow consumers to explore potential alternatives to the traditional carrier-customer relationship:

- **FreedomPop—**Provides consumers with the base 500MB of 4G data, unlimited texts, and 200 voice minutes for free each month, with the option to expand usage for a minimal fee depending on their need. Enabling users to connect via VoIP aims to reduce costs and free customers from the hassle of the common contract.
- **Ting Mobile—**Charges customers for each voice minute, text message, and megabyte separately. Users may choose their desired plan via Ting's cost calculator, allowing them to select from bundles size XS to XXL. Then, at the end of each month, Ting credits consumers for what they don't use and charge for any overages without any additional penalty fees.
- **Republic Wireless—**Offloads calls and texts to Wi-Fi whenever possible, allowing consumers to reduce their 4G usage and limit costs. Plans start at $5 and afford customers access to some of today's most popular phone models, such as the Moto X, at lower prices than Sprint, the brand's partner, currently offers consumers.
- **Giv Mobile—**Plays off the no-contract trend by providing consumers with unlimited access to its 4G GSM network for $29. Yet, while Giv also offers a variety of phones, including the ability to carry over an unlocked GSM phone, the brand differentiates itself from the competition by donating 8 percent of each customers' monthly bill to their charity of choice.

Though new devices with more attractive features are introduced at a faster pace than ever before, the future of mobile lies beyond its networks and its phones. As Smith highlights, such components will only grow cheaper and faster as time passes. Instead, the future lies with data, as this factor will inevitably enhance lifestyle, improve health alternatives, provide better shopping experiences, collect more and different data to give back to consumers and make lives better to generate new revenue streams. Consumers wish to sustain their digital connection 24/7, and mobile carriers are positioned to meet this demand as the need expands.

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